

We brought the story of Music in England up to the end of the seventeenth century close to the arrival of Handel. But before we can discuss that gentleman-imposing composer's works we shall have to pick up a lot of threads as the strongest influences upon Handel, especially in the matter of style, come from Italy, and we have only brought the story of Music in Italy up to about the middle of the 17th century. It is probable also that a good many of you have no very vivid recollection of what happened before that ~~And for those who have not heard anything about Musical doings in Italy it may be profitable to recapitulate shortly~~ so it may be profitable to recapitulate shortly. The Italians began the history of Opera by trying to set poems to a kind of recitative with very simple accompaniment which served for little more than a support for the voice. It was done in the sincere and simple belief that the poems and the stories set were the essential things and that the business of Music was just to make it singable instead of speakable. Of this kind of Opera Peri's and Caccini's settings of Euridice are examples 1600. Then came Monteverde 1567- 1643 with his ideas of using Music to emphasize the effect of dramatic situations by Musical effects and to use Musical expression in his intensifying the situation and illustrating human feelings by Musical expression. NB Monteverde aimed at intensity. He astonished the world very considerably with his Ariadne Orfeo in 1607 and Orfeo Ariadne in 1608. They seem to have made the same sort of impression on his contemporaries as Electra and Salome make upon Strauss's. Monteverde's idea was right enough, but Music was in too primitive a condition for his purposes – and though he does interesting and striking things at times, the sum total of ~~these~~ such works is hopelessly crude and ungainly. However Music progressed pretty rapidly for a time, and Monteverde's pupil Cavalli followed on his lines with some success. Monteverde had no intention of

Cavalli carried the tradition to France where his
'Serse' and 'Ercole Amante' were performed, and
Lulli collaborated and wrote the ballet airs.

Necessity of organization.

'To thy dark Servant'

8 Violins, 11 Violettas, 2 Viole da Gamba, 1 Violone
(D. Bass) 4 Theorbos (or big lutes) 2 Cornetti, 1
bassoon and 3 Trombones.

writing tunes and Arias at first, but only to set the dramas in what he thought was a Musical equivalent. Cavalli 1599 or 1600 d.1676 began to find the virtue of separating portions off into tuneful Arias – separate pieces for the singers. And this line was followed up more frankly by his contemporary Cesti 1620-1669. They began to find out that the audiences did not care for the drama so much after all, they liked to hear the singers in melodious passages. In a sense they were right. Moneverde had tried to go ahead too fast and the result was from the Musical point of view chaotic. It was necessary to get it organized. And the first steps in organization were effected by the introduction of Arias. Italians developed their capacities of producing melodies of the Operatic kind by degrees. But they retained their hold on a serious ideal of Music for a time and among the most conspicuous composers who showed solidity in their Operatic work in the middle of the century were Legrenzi and Stradella. Legrenzi was born about 1625 near Bergamo in North Italy. He was Maestro di Capella at Ferrara in 1664, and by 1672 Director of the Conservatorio dei Mendicanti at Venice. Where also he became Maestro di Capella at St Mark's in 1685. He was a solidly grounded Musician and showed his powers in various branches of Art such as Church Music, Instrumental Music and Opera. Most of his more important works were written for Venice, with satisfactory results. He was evidently keen about instrumental Music and reorganized the band at St Mark's. It is interesting to take note of its constitution – as in those days all things connected with instrumental Music were in a transitional stage. The band consisted of 8 Violins, 11 Violettas, 2 Viole da Braccia, 2 Viole da Gamba, 1 Violone (or Double Bass)

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4 Theorbos (or big lutes) 2 Cornetti, 1 bassoon and 3 trombones. His most important contribution to the evolution of Musical Art was in his Operas. He wrote 17, of which Achille in Sciro was the first – 1664. La Divisione del Mondo 1675 – Totila 1677, and the last was Pertinace 1684. These Operas show a considerable increase in facility and scope – knowledge of what to do, both to suit the soloists and in the matter of form. The individual numbers are spaced out more widely on an average than the movements of Cavalli and earlier composers. On the other hand the tendency can be felt to drift away from strong dramatic expression and characterization, such as we find in Monteverde's earlier work. The solo work is becoming more melodious and vocal but tends to a sort of general average – a diffusion of the immediate expression. There is no intensity about it. There is plenty of Musicianship and a liking for such devices as ground bass. Legrenzi had the singular fortune to have a high compliment paid to him both by Handel and Bach. For Handel copied the whole of one of his Motetts himself – the MS whereof is at Buckingham Palace. And he further adapted a conspicuous phrase from that same Motett and put it into the Chorus “O first crested beam” in Samson. And Bach wrote a very interesting Organ fugue upon one of his subjects. Which shows that those two great men had a high opinion of him. Legrenzi died in 1690.

Stradella born 1645 at Naples is the hero of a famous romance which is ~~is frequent~~ much more frequently referred to than his music – though it probably never happened! The romance is that a lady beloved by some powerful nobleman fell in love with him and that he was assassinated through the machinations of the said nobleman. As it seems to have been proved that he was alive and composing

There is a wedding Cantata for one of the family of
the Brignole of Genoa preserved in MS at Modena, on
the first page of the score which is written “del Signor
Alessandro Stradella 1681, L’ultime delle sue
Sinfonie.”

several years after the date given for his assassination the details of the story would at any rate require modification. The story has more than once been made into an Opera – but it doesn't concern us. Stradella was undoubtedly a composer of great prowess and very high Musicianship. His qualities are shown in the Oratorio of St John the Baptist, in which there are long and fully developed Arias and one really fine and effective Chorus in a very free contrapuntal style. His compositions are very difficult to get sight of, but what there are gives the impression of vigour, warmth mastery and variety of characterization. He illustrated the tendency of the time to indulge in profuse florid passages – which are among the indications that Opera is drifting into a form of entertainment to show off the singers – the tendency of Italian Operatic Art to emphasize pleasant melody is also apparent in him. Among his Operas were L'Arianna "Floridoro" – Il Trespolo. So diverse are the circumstances of Stradella's life that it is not even known whether any of his Operas were performed. He also wrote Cantatas a voce sola – and a certain famous Serenata out of which Handel stole a great deal of Music, both phrases and melodies, when he was composing Israel in Egypt in a hurry. We do not know when he was born, nor when he died. But only that his birth must have been around 1645, and his death about 1681. But at all events one thing is certain that he was one of the foremost and most interesting composers of his time. Both Legrenzi and Stradella exercised considerable influence the next great composer we have to take note of, who is Alessandro Scarlatti. They represent the stage of development in Opera immediately before him – and he as much as any composer moulded the scheme of Italian Opera

Lulli's Amour et Bacchus 1672
Proserpine 1680 Perse 1682
Phaeton 1683 Amadis 1684
Roland 1685 Armide 1686

into the condition of extreme formality which suited the singers and the ~~luxurious-indolent and luxurious-classes-indolence of the courtly classes~~ in all countries, and soon dropped the original intention of Musical drama altogether out of sight. But though the effect of Scarlatti's work in Opera was in some ways baneful he was a very great composer and solved many problems of style and Artistic method in such a way ~~as to exert a powerful influence upon Mozart, and even to establish that classical Italian style with which even Beethoven began~~ as to advance the technique of Art in many branches. So there is every reason to give him some attention, and to try to see the reasons why his Art took the course it did. We do know when he died because ~~from the his tombstone which is dated~~ gives the date 1725 ~~and says that he was about 66 years old when he died. So that it is likely he was born in 1659.~~ But we can only guess when he was born as the tombstone only says he was 66 years old when he died. So he might have been born in either 1658 or 1659. I think 1659 has the preference. His early life is wrapped in obscurity. Some say he was a Sicilian and that he was born at Trapani. It doesn't matter anyway. He appears to have obtained recognition first in Rome, and his first Opera (as far as can be discovered) was privately produced there at the Collegio Clementino in February 1679. It goes by the very long name of "L'errore innocente overo Gli Equivoci nel Sembiante". It is generally known as 'Gli Equivoci nel Sembiante'. It is a small work and it is said to indicate nothing conspicuously Scarlattian except some tuneful Arias. It seems however to have been regarded as very successful. It was followed in the next year 1680 by "L'Honestà negli Amori", which up till recent years has always been described as his first Opera! The preface describes him as the Maestro di Capella to the Queen of Sweden – and as a Sicilian.

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The reference to Christina, who after her abdication lived in Rome and was a great and intelligent patron of Art and everything intellectual indicates that already he was coming to the front. This Opera has more scope than the first, and shows how gradually and surely Scarlatti developed his powers. Another Opera Pompeo soon followed in 1693 – being possibly his first full sized Opera Seria. It was performed in Rome and also in Naples in 1684 where it was a great success and probably was the cause of Scarlatti's leaving Rome and the service of Queen Christina – as records show that he was appointed Maestro di Capella to the Court of Naples in that year – and he made that his head quarters for 18 years. The place exerted the evil influence upon him that it has exerted over everyone. ~~They~~ The Neapolitans wanted plenty of Operas, but they wanted them all wrong. Of all the towns in Italy ~~Neapolitan taste~~ Naples was always most trivial and superficial. Scarlatti with a certain amount of compunction, fell in with the taste of his employers. The scheme of his Operas became mechanical. ~~They mostly~~ What the Neapolitan Court and people wanted was a lot of Arias for the singers and Scarlatti's facility was most serviceable. He developed a sort of knack of writing agreeable melodic phrases which suited the singers and casting them in the Aria form, and providing recitatives to alternate with them and make a break between one Aria and another.

Floods of Arias. Wrote a whole Opera in 5 weeks.

The drama became quite a secondary matter. Just a sort of story to hold the Arias together and give them a sort of ~~significance~~ coherence. Indeed the drama was hardly even secondary for the Neapolitans were very fond of the scenery and rejoiced in magnificent mounting. As is the case with all low class minds they set more store on the accessories – just the things which appealed to their superficial nature; and anything interesting in the drama itself only bored them. They liked comic scenes, and Scarlatti put in plenty of them in his serious Operas, but strangely enough he did not write any complete Comic Opera till later in life. He mainly devoted himself to developing great facility in turning out those floods of Arias. ~~A great many of these Operas~~ And he could turn them out at a great pace. He is said to have written one entire Opera in five weeks and another in six! A great many of them were very thin and there is no need to dwell upon them. He did not go in much for feeling or expression except such as was spread out over long spaces of melody. And though his accompaniments were what would be called Musicianly or Classical they did not in the Neapolitan time minister much to the interest of the proceedings. The performances of the singers was what the Neapolitans cared about. He wrote ~~about~~ at least 2 Operas a year so ~~it is no use to attempt~~ it would be futile to give you a catalogue of them; ~~neither would it be of any service~~ as you would not remember them or if you did they would be of no use to you. One of the

Arias

Overtures

Ferdinand de Medici.

best that was written during the Neapolitan period was not written for Naples but for some private festivities in Rome. This was Rosaura about which there will be more to be said presently. It was probably produced in 1690. La Statira produced in the same year has good points. Pirro e Demetrio of 1694 is said to be one of the best. In 1702 some inner discontent seems to have got hold of him, and he applied for leave of absence – and when he got it he prolonged it. He seems to have turned away from the Opera career for a while as he obtained the appointment of assistant Maestro di Capella at the Church of Sta. Maria Maggiore in Rome in 1703. Rome offered little facilities for public Opera at the time, as the Pope, Innocent XI, was very antagonistic to them. But he did not keep away from Opera long as he found a patron in Prince Ferdinand de Medici who had a theatre at Pratolino near Florence and for that theatre he began writing more Operas. The standard of taste was a little better there so he was encouraged to write better music. And this had (a) good effect upon him – for when he had an opportunity to produce a work in Venice in 1707 he produced one of the finest of all his Operas “Mitridate Eupatore” It had rather a better libretto than usual, and the more serious attitude of Venetians towards art inspired him to adopt a much more interesting style. And to this standard he mainly adhered for the rest of his life. He was induced to return to Naples for a time in 1709 but he does not seem to have written many

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more Operas for Naples. The Opera *Il Ciro* was written for the Carnival in Rome in 1712. The fact that it was written for the Carnival may perhaps account for its pre-eminently containing ballets – which are features that are generally significantly in the background in Italian Operas. Italian composers, when they stopped at home, seem to have but little natural aptitude for ballet tunes. Scarlatti's Musical gifts were generally ready for any branch or style of Art. But in Ballet Music it does not seem as if he excelled. Quite apart from the few examples that are available for inspection it is certain that if he had written good Ballet Music the world in general would not have allowed it to disappear into limbo. Three years later 1715 a landmark came in the Opera *Tigrane*, which has the reputation of being the finest of his Operas – apparently that was written for Naples – It contains a copious supply of comic scenes. Then in 1718 came 'Il Trionfo d'Onore', which goes by the name of being his one purely comic Opera – or as the Neapolitans called it "comedy in Music". The history of comic elements in Italian Opera is interesting and curious. During the greater part of the seventeenth century – even from so early as Cavalli – the serious ~~airs~~ attitudes of grand drama were interspersed liberally with comic scenes and comic passages. Ultimately the influence of audiences brought about a very odd arrangement. Which was to have a light comic Opera performed between the acts of a serious Opera, scene for scene, alternating. This was the type of work known as the Intermezzo. This odd form of parasite did not indeed come to be definitely recognized till a little after Scarlatti's death – And we must defer consideration of it till we arrive at that period.

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But as far as can be judged from the obscurities of history in connection with Neapolitan Operatic matters ~~at that time~~ another form of full sized Musical Comedy in 3 acts was separating off into definiteness in the big stream of Operatic evolution about this time. ~~And Scarlatti now in the full maturity of years afforded this example;~~ The 'Teatro di Fiorentini' had for some time been producing Comic Operas in Neapolitan dialect. And Scarlatti must have written this work, though it is not in Neapolitan dialect, ~~which is said to be very bright and amusing~~ to fit with this enterprise. It is said by a trustworthy authority to be very amusing – rather like Mozart's Don Giovanni. The rest of Scarlatti's Operas (which appear to have been four in number) were written for Rome; and the last (of) which was Griselda (patient Grizel, the same subject as Schumann's Genoveva) was quite one of the best. It came out in 1721. Scarlatti seems to have been mainly in Rome the last few years of his life. And one hears of a good many compositions for the Church being written – a mass in A in 1720, an Ave Maria and a Psalm in 1723, and a Stabat Mater (exact date unascertainable). All Scarlatti's sacred Music is of very little importance, it is essentially mundane. The spirit of devotion was quite dead in those days – and Music for the Church was mainly an occasion for entertainment in which leading Opera singers took a prominent part. The business of religion was for the wealthy classes mere theatrical pasteboard, as you may see in the frightful decorations in Romanist Churches of the 18th century – and the Music was just as empty and devoid of any kind of spiritual feeling as anything else. It cannot be guessed whether Scarlatti gave much attention to

Cambise, 1719 Scarlatti's last Opera for Naples.

Church Music because he thought his end was approaching. At all events for the last four years of his life he did not write any Operas. He died in October 1725. Mr Dent, his invaluable biographer, quotes the Gazette of Naples “In the course of last week ~~there died~~ the celebrated Cavalier Alessandro Scarlatti ~~rendered his soul to the Lord~~ to whom Music owes much for the numerous works with which he enriched it, rendered his soul to the Lord”. As Mr Dent points out such a laconic record does not sound much as if the public who read the Gazzetta di Napoli thought Scarlatti of much account. It is easy to read between the lines that ~~though~~ he was much too good a composer for them. No doubt he did try very hard to adapt himself to their tastes, but he could not quite rid himself of a native strenuousness of disposition, which caused him to make some of his works interesting when a situation appealed to him. And for a thing to be interesting it must appeal to mind and imagination, and the Neapolitans – especially their court people – had neither, so they got tired of him and after 1719 he was losing hold there. Indeed Scarlatti’s position is altogether singularly paradoxical. He always conveys the impression of solidity, generally of dignity and seriousness, of having a feeling for real beauty of melody and phrase and vigour of mind. But he was condemned to make use of his powers for the most frivolous and superficial and indulgent and most worthless people in Europe; and it was under their influence that he by degrees worked out the scheme of Italian Grand Opera with the form which survived for several generations

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and which is so utterly mechanical and empty that even the genius of Handel could not save works written in Scarlatti's scheme from being utterly ridiculous as solutions of the problem of Musical drama. They became mere entertainments. And yet though totally undramatic Scarlatti again did quite inimitable service by developing the Classical dramatic style, as we know it in Mozart. The Classical dramatic style is of course quite different from the true dramatic style. It is loaded up with special conventions. But it does differ also from the Classic instrumental style. And in both lines Scarlatti's work is of extraordinary importance. One thinks of Music of the crude earlier type of Carissimi, Cesti, Legrenzi and Stradella and Rossi, passing through his hands and coming out at last with style classified and defined, with forms made so clear and sure that they worked precisely like machinery, and even with indications of the direction in which the development of Orchestration would have to go. He has been called the father of Classical Music. That is a big statement – he may perhaps justly be called the establisher of Classical Style. His influence upon Handel in early days was very great indeed. People whose chronology is liable to be mixed call his works Handelian – it's only their way of expressing that Handel's works are Scarlattiian. Pergolesi was indebted to him. Mozart and all his compeers to an enormous degree – even Beethoven in his early period! It has fallen to very few composers to have such sweeping influence. His output was enormous. He wrote over 110 Operas – over 100 Cantatas a voce sola (long works in Operatic style). Instrumental works, Serenatas

Church compositions (some of which he tried to write in Palestrina's style -) His facility is almost annoying. It is felt that personally he is very little concerned in the matter. He has found out how to turn things out glibly, neatly, elegantly, like a first rate workman making watches or boots or bicycles. If his personal nature shines out here & there it is rather by accident. There is next to no spirituality about him. It is all complacently mundane, & the classes for whom he wrote were. And yet in its way it is astonishingly good that it fills a wide space in the history of the art.

His overtures.

Church compositions (some of which he tried to write in the style of Palestrina) – his facility is almost annoying. It is felt that personally he is very little concerned in the matter. He has found out how to make things glibly, neatly, elegantly, at times even forcibly, like a first rate workman making watches or boots or bicycles. He has unquestionably a style of his own – he is a personality – But if his personal feelings shine out here and there it is rather by accident than intention. There is next to no spirituality about him. His work is mundane, as the classes for whom he wrote were mundane – and yet in its way all his work is astonishingly good of its kind. Moreover he deserves credit for things which the stupid Neapolitan audiences could certainly have done without. His ~~orderly~~ instinct for orderliness, proportion, design took effect in other directions besides the Arias – and this is most noticeable in his Overtures. Composers before his time had tried all sorts of experiments in firming up something to be played while people were getting into their places – from the barbarous but appropriate Toccata with which Monteverde begins his Orfeo and the queer Infernale at the beginning of Cavalli's Peleus and Thetis, to groups of

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movements including bits of fugue and dance tunes, such as the Overture to 'La Dori' by Cesti. But their intentions were very undecided and mostly rather helpless. When Scarlatti gave his mind to this important feature in the Operatic panoply, he ultimately gave up the idea of associating the Overture with the play, by any connection of thematic material, and worked out his idea of the Overture as a quite independent piece of work. Such works consisted of an introductory slow movement, an energetic allegro, a short central slow movement and a lively last movement. And this became known later as the Italian type of Overture - ~~But in these~~ to distinguish it from the French type employed by Lulli and Handel and Spohr and Mendelssohn. In those days it was called the "Sinfonia avanti l'Opera". And when such groups of movements came to be sufficiently important to be played apart from the Opera to which they belonged, ~~they were called by~~ composers began to write similar works without Operas to them and called them Symphonies. And out of this grew the form of the Symphony with which we are familiar - ~~the highest~~ So that Scarlatti not only defined the style of Classical Music, but even gave a very important push to the greatest and highest form of Orchestral Music - which in a sort of way derives from him. Moreover he did more than this in connection with Orchestral Music. He was about the first composer who arrived at the right conception of Modern Orchestral Style. Italian composers were only too ready to save themselves trouble by treating their orchestral instruments perfunctorily; and filling up on the harpsichord with chords indicated by figured bass. Scarlatti in some of his latest Operas divined the way to dispense with the figured bass by introducing horns, and using them and Hautboys and other wind instruments in ways which really suited their technique and made their power of sustaining tone helpful to the

general effect and a means of variety and colour. The value of his services to Art is thus to be seen in many directions. And the type of services is very much like the type of Mozart. He was not at all a revolutionary, and he was very far from proclaiming himself the herald of new departures in Music. But he took things as they were and improved and widened and coordinated and even quietly ~~gained~~ realized new paths when they came in sight. Of his personal character we know next to nothing. There are a few anecdotes of his relations to Corelli, and Quanz (sic) and Hasse and Geminiani. The most amusing of which is that about Quanz, ~~the~~ who was a famous flute player and teacher of Frederick the Great in the humble capacity of flutist. Quanz, being in Rome, wanted to see the famous Scarlatti. Scarlatti begged to be excused ~~because~~ “I can’t bear players of wind instruments” said he, “they always play so out of tune”. However he did see Quanz, and even played with him in the last year of his life. Another light is got from Scarlatti’s excessively obsequious letters to Italian Grandees. They are not agreeable reading. One has to realize that Italian Aristocrats were extremely odious people – and regarded all common people, including the most gifted men in the world, merely as provided by Providence to minister to their entertainment. And when the common people did not behave with proper sense of their abysmal inferiority they were liable to be left to starve.